411 hand and all wore the distinctive carnelian-
[15] studded dagger, and one and all impressed
me as virile, reckless and uncontrolled, but
701 humorous and friendly. While we sat among
621 them talking there was a sudden stir, for they
had noticed a dozen mounted Arabs approach-
ing rapidly across the dunes. Then someone
recognized one of the camels and they re-
laxed. These camels were stretched out and
travelling very fast, yet were urged to even
greater efforts by the wild yells of their riders.
They were the scouts, sons of sheikhs and the
very pick of the tribe, who set out each dawn
to scour the surrounding desert, keen-eyed for
the tracks of strangers. Lithe, hard-bodied
and alert, these lads rode their splendid beasts
with effortless mastery. They had heard the
firing and, thinking the camp attacked, had
ridden back to help.

621 Scattered upon the dunes around us were
592 small black tents, round which naked infants
romped, while dark-clad women moved about
gathering sticks and tending herds of goats.
Sometimes a family changed its site, for,
though fear of raiders had imposed upon
them the need to keep together, their restless
nomad instincts drove them to conitant move-
ment within the wide confines of the camp.
Such short migrations provided an interesting
sight as they moved slowly past. The children
drove the camels, laden with tents, cooking-
pots, watering-troughs and ropes, the simple
requirements of their life; while the Bedu
mothers and the virgin beauties of the tribe
rode in the slow swaying camel-litters.

574 That evening they feasted us on meat and,
after the camel herds had drifted in at dusk,
brought us great frothing bowls of milk, the
nectar of the Arabs. The night was filled with
the haunting sounds of an Arab camp—the
ceaseless restless moaning of camels, the bark-
ing of dogs, the rise and fall of Arab voices
from their gathering-places round the fires,
and sometimes the distant harmony of song.

312 Next morning when the sun was warm we
drove our camels across the sandy plain to
water at the well, which is situated close
under high limestone cliffs on the northern
401 edge of the valley. A few Arabs had already
312 arrived and were fastening their pulleys to the
scaffolding around the well. It is over 200 feet
in depth and stone-lined, a monument to
some forgotten people in the dim past. At the
deep wells in the Najd the Arabs use their

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camels to draw up the water, but the southern Bedu always lift it by hand. They fasten a leather bucket, holding about four gallons, to either end of the rope which runs over the pulley, so that as one bucket is drawn up full the other descends empty. Men and women draw together on the well-ropes, four or five to each rope, singing in chorus as they work. We had not been here long before the camel herds arrived and the serious work of watering began. Great leather troughs supported on crossed wooden hoops were set up by each family around the well. Soon there was no room for more watering parties, and late-comers had to wait their turn. The buckets rose and fell and were tipped into the troughs about which the thirsty camels pushed and thrust while their calves frolicked around. Shouting herdboys, stripped to the waist, ran in and out among them, driving away camels which did not belong to them, and restraining the more impatient of their own. Others scratched the hind-quarters of their favourite beasts, while they sang them their watering songs to induce them to drink deep. When they had drunk they were couched nearby, to be watered again later in the day, before being driven back to pasturage. Round the well-mouth women filled their water-skins, which then lay swollen and quivering upon the ground, guarded from the trampling feet of the camels by shrill-voiced little girls, clad only in a leather fringe around their waists. Few of the women were veiled and all joined freely in the constant jests and laughter. Among them was a tall girl of startling beauty. She had come down to the well early in the day, carrying a water-skin and accompanied by her young sister. The centre of a happy laughing group of lads, she dallied here till the evening.

A family of Sa'ar from off the mountains were camped under an overhanging cliff nearby, and they bade us join them and drink coffee. Kinsmen of the Bin Ma'aruf, they yet differed from them in their dress and way of life. They were indigo-dyed loincloths and wraps around their shoulders, as is the fashion among the Southern Bedu, whereas the Bin Ma'aruf were clad like the Northern Arabs in long white shirts whose pointed sleeves fell nearly to the ground. They were returning to their homes in Raidat al Sa'ar, a two days' journey to the south. Bloodcrops of sorghum and beans are grown there in a shallow valley, guarded by numerous stone-built forts and watch-towers, which look out across the desolate rocky plateau. Raidat is seldom visited by other Arabs, for it is the very stronghold of the Sa'ar, who have an evil reputation for